

**SERMON – 05/04/08**  
*“TO LOVE AND TO CHERISH: Sexual Intimacy”*  
Song of Solomon 1:1-4; 2:4-7

I think I was in the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> grade. It was summer vacation. Our family had traveled up to visit our relatives in Virginia...

- There we were... the three oldest cousins... huddled together in Aunt Dinah’s family room...
  - It was close to midnight...
  - Our little brothers & sisters were all sound asleep....
  - Our sleeping bags were all turned towards each other...
  - We had a flashlight... and were taking turns looking at this sexually explicit book called...
  - THE SONG OF SOLOMON!
- I’m not kidding... there we were reading passages of scripture... and giggling the whole time!
  - *“Kiss me – full on the mouth! Yes! For your love is better than wine!” (1:2)*
  - *“The smooth, lithe lines of your neck command notice – all heads turn in awe and admiration! Your breasts are like fawns, twins of a gazelle, grazing among the first spring flowers.” (4:4-5)*
  - *“My dear lover glows with health – red-blooded, radiant! He’s one in a million. There’s no one quite like him... Fine muscles ripple beneath his skin, quiet & beautiful. His torso is the work of a sculptor, hard and smooth as ivory.” (5:10, 14)*
  - *“You are tall and supple, like the palm tree, and your full breasts are like sweet clusters of dates. I say, ‘I’m going to climb that palm tree! I’m going to caress its fruit!’” (7:7-8)*
  - Man, this was good stuff! I couldn’t believe it was in the BIBLE!?!
- The Song of Solomon, my friends, is an erotic love poem... sometimes from the perspective of a man... sometimes from the perspective of a woman.

- And never is it shy about discussing the gift of sexuality!
- We, on the other hand, tend to giggle... blush... and get a little embarrassed whenever the topic of sex is mentioned... especially in church!
- Well, buckle up, my friends... because that's exactly what we'll be talking about all sermon long today!
- Welcome to the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in our sermon series entitled, 'TO LOVE AND TO CHERISH: A Biblical view of Love, Sex & Marriage.'
  - And yes, we've finally come to the "sex sermon" that I'm sure you all noticed when we first passed out the sermon fliers!
  - I think it's too bad that we tend to keep the topic of sex away from church... when it was precisely something that God created as a good gift for humankind!
  - If you're new to this series, welcome! We're glad you came today.
  - In the 3 weeks prior, we've looked at some of the **internal/emotional differences** between men & women... we've talked about how to find our spouse's '**love language,**' so we can DO things to meet their emotional need to feel loved...
  - And last week we looked at some **unhealthy habits** that married couples sometimes get caught up in.
  - (If you missed any of those, you can find them on our church website under the "Sermons" link.)

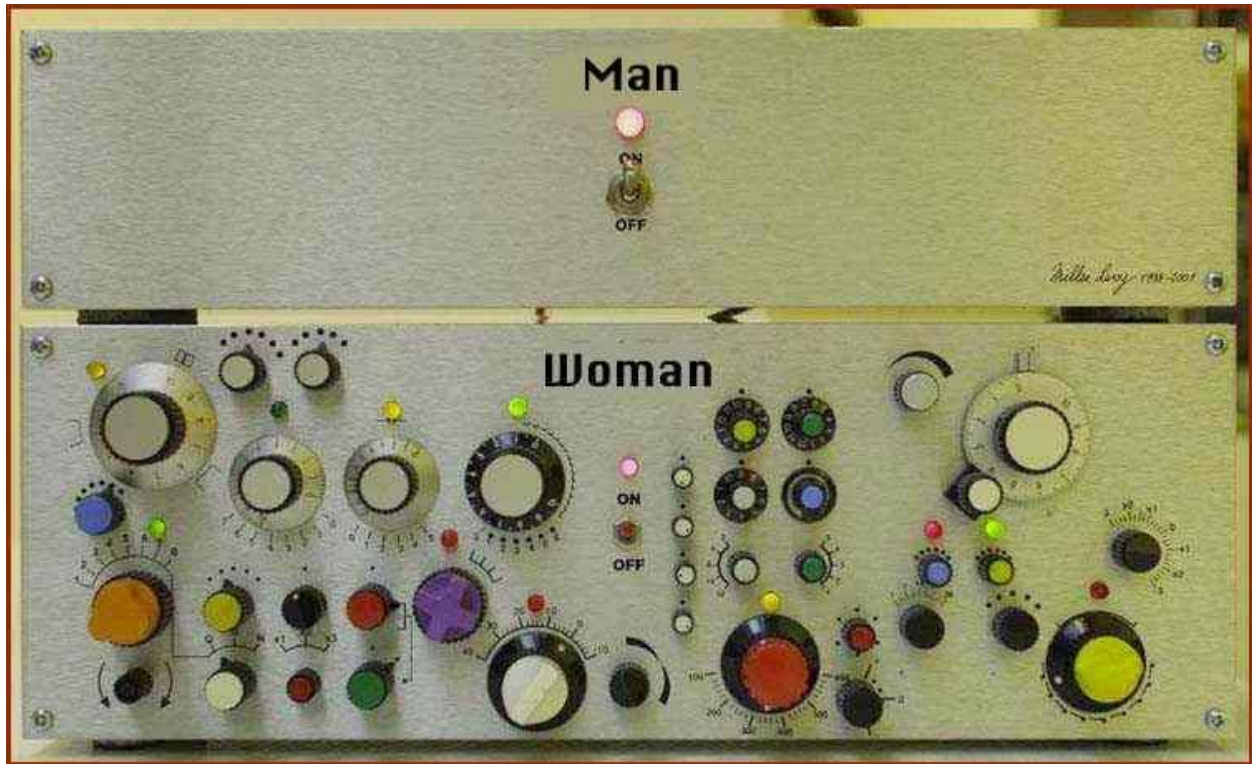
I'd like to begin today's message by staying in the Song of Solomon... (but hopefully without the giggling!)

- Pastor Rob Bell, in his NOOMA video entitled, "Flame," teaches that there are at least 3 different Hebrew words for our English word "love" in the Song of Solomon...
- The first word is **Raya**...
  - Raya would be translated literally as "friend" or "companion"... someone you enjoy hanging out with.
  - We might even translate it as "soul mate"!
  - Song of Solomon 4:7 says, "*You're beautiful from head to toe, my dear **raya** (love), beautiful beyond compare, absolutely flawless.*"
  - At the core of some loving relationships, then, is this deep friendship...

- The second Hebrew word for love in Song of Solomon is *ahava*...
  - Ahava is a sense of deep affection...
  - It's when your mind and your heart are bent towards your lover with passion & intensity... and this is more profound than romantic feelings from an 'in-love experience'...
  - Song of Solomon 8:7 says, "*Many waters cannot quench ahava (love); rivers cannot wash it away. If one were to give all the wealth of his house for ahava (love), it would be utterly scorned.*"
  - Ahava is a love that leads to commitment... it's making a decision to join your life to the life of another.
- The third Hebrew word for love is *dod*...
  - Dod translated in English literally means to "carouse," to "rock," or to "fondle."
  - It's the physical, sexual, erotic element to a relationship.
  - Song of Solomon 1:2 says, "*May he kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, for your dod (love) is better than wine.*"
- So according to the Song of Solomon, there are **three flames of love**: *raya*, *ahava* & *dod*!
  - But here's the key – God created us to have all three flames burning together!
  - One flame, burning all by itself, will never be as hot as all the flames burning together.
  - A relationship that only expresses itself physically, through sex, without deep friendship and commitment is missing something...
  - Likewise, a relationship that has a commitment, but has lost the friendship & sexual passion, is also missing something.
  - We were created by God to have friendship, commitment & physical passion bound up together in Love!
  - When we separate the flames, it can never really satisfy.
  - True love involves giving all of ourselves completely to another – body, soul & spirit!

With this as our foundation, let's spend a little time working in the 'dod' area of love... physical sexuality.

- I'd like to go back to a couple of books we looked at during week one of this series: For Men Only and For Women Only by Shaunti & Jeff Feldhahn.
  - I won't rehash all of the important insights these books raised about men & women... but want to focus, rather, on their discussion of sex.
  - It's important for all of us to remember that men & women are 'wired differently' when it comes to the area of sex & intimacy.
  - It's no great secret that 75% of the husbands they surveyed wanted sex more often than their wives... but that's not the end of the story.
- One of the points the authors made was that women **do** tend to have a **lower sex drive** than men... but they'd change that *if they could*.
  - Experts have discovered that the average woman has less testosterone (and other sexually assertive hormones) than the average man... and therefore has less of an urge to pursue sex.
  - But women, on the other hand, have more estrogen... which is tied to what's called "receptive" sexual desire... meaning, they tend to be available, but simply don't have as much craving to pursue it.
- Second, women need more 'warm-up' or 'anticipation' time than men when it comes to sexual intimacy...
  - Guys, our "motor" is pretty much always running in this area... but that's not so for most women.
  - Women need the build up... or warm-up... they need to have time for their brain to catch up with the moment.
  - Patience & the pursuit of romance will go a long way, men.
- The third (and final) insight I'd like to share from their discoveries... is that sex starts in different places for men & women... (and no, guys, that's NOT what I mean!).
  - This picture might help explain things...



- Men are quite visual... and sexual desire often starts with the eyes. That alone can be what ‘flips the switch’ and gets things going for men.
- We see our wives looking especially attractive, and our body registers that attraction.
- Sexual desire for women, on the other hand, does not start with the eyes... it starts with the HEART!
- It’s her emotions, not her physiology, which registers desire... if she feels loved and admired & appreciated by her husband, then she often has a desire to be physically intimate with him.
- But without the emotional closeness, she may have little physical desire.
- There are many more great suggestions along these lines in these two books... and I commend them to your perusal.

I want to spend the last part of our time together this morning with a little more from Pastor Rob Bell... this time from his book, Sex...God: Exploring the Endless Connections between Sexuality & Spirituality...

- From the perspective of the Scriptures, a man & a woman coming together is a picture of God and his people coming together – the God of Exodus, the God who travels with his people in a cloud of smoke and fire.
  - To symbolically represent this coming together, for thousands of years Jews have taken a **prayer shawl**, which in the book of Numbers God commanded the people to wear (Num. 15:38)...
  - They then fastened the four corners to four poles, and the wedding attendants held the four poles so that the couple could exchange their vows under the **canopy** (or *chuppah*).
  - Just as God ‘hovered over’ the people of Israel while they were journeying through the wilderness... so, too, does God ‘hover over’ a marriage couple... protecting them, journeying with them, and blessing their union.
- In the ancient world, after the vows had been exchanged... the couple still wasn’t officially married. There was still one important act that made them married. **THEIR PHYSICAL UNION.**
  - So the wedding party would lead them to their bridal chamber... attach the chuppah above their bed... leave them... and the couple would consummate their relationship... with all the guests waiting outside!
  - When the woman says in the Song of Songs, “The king has brought me into his chambers,” this is wedding language!
  - Then the couple would come out, and the celebration would begin. **Now that they’ve had sex, they’re married.**
  - Because central to the celebration of their marriages is the celebration that they are sexual beings. And central to their union is the sexual relationship.
  - Everybody at the celebration knows that they’ve had sex because they sat outside and waited.
  - Their understanding is that sex is not an optional thing for a marriage, something couples can take or leave. The sexual bond is central to what it means to be married. No consummation, no marriage.
- This understanding of sex as marriage is found throughout the bible because it was thought of this way throughout the ancient world.

- Ex.22:16 – “When a man seduces a virgin who is not engaged to be married, and lies with her, he shall give the bride-price for her and make her his wife.”
- Deut. 22:28-29 – “If a man happens to meet a virgin who is not pledged to be married and rapes her and they are discovered, he shall pay her father 50 shekels of silver. He must marry the young woman, for he has violated her. He can never divorce her as long as he lives.”
- Now granted, we have a much different view of women today... they are not property to be traded between men... but if you look behind that, you’ll see something deeper...
  - Women basically had no rights in the ancient Near East. A man could do anything he wanted to her... and would be free from the consequences of his actions.
  - And a woman who was raped was considered violated and unclean and would often be considered unworthy to be **anyone’s wife**...ever!
  - But this passage essentially says to the man, “You want to have sex with her? Then you must take her as your wife, take care of her, provide for her needs, fulfill your duties as a husband to her. She is your equal, and you will treat her as such!”
  - And once we get to the NT, things have progressed so far that men are being commanded to **lay down their lives** for women!
- SEX, IN THE ANCIENT WORLD, WAS MARRIAGE. If you had sex, you were married.
  - All that needed to be worked out was the legal and financial consequences of what this man and this woman had just done.
  - The physical union was what, in the eyes of society, made them man & wife. At the wedding, then, the party didn’t start until they had sex.
  - This isn’t a lower view of sex... but rather a higher view of marriage.
  - It is people living in the reality of the decisions they’ve already made!

Friends, we were created by God as sexual beings... and sex was given to us by God from the very beginning...

- “Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.” (Genesis 2:24)
  - It is one expression of the love & intimacy between a couple who have given themselves to each other for eternity...
  - It’s the flame of **dod**... the physical, erotic, sexual expression of love...
  - But let us also remember that it is just ONE of the THREE **love flames** we’ve been given...
  - There’s also **raya**... friendship... being ‘soul-mates!’
  - And **ahava**... commitment...
- Thanks be to God for the opportunity to truly love another – through friendship, commitment & physical love...
  - May we honor the way God has created us...
  - May we realize that these three flames were meant to burn together...
  - And may we discover the incredible connection between sexual intimacy & our spirituality.
  - AMEN.